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Princeton Theological Review

A Journal by and for Students of Theology
Dedicated to The Rev. Dr. Charles Hodge (1797-1878),
Professor of Systematic Theology,
Princeton Theological Seminary

September, 1994

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Uplifting Our Theological Heritage and Providing
Substantive Theological Discourse

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Princeton Theological Review

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A New Review?

by Raymond D. Cannata

In January of 1825, Charles Hodge, a 27 year old instructor at the young theological seminary at Princeton announced to the reading public a new periodical. It was titled *The Biblical Repertory: A Collection of Tracts in Biblical Literature*. This was to be a modest endeavor, consisting of translations of current European works of biblical scholarship, with no original compositions of its own. By the time Prof. Hodge returned from a two year tour of study in Europe it was agreed by the editors that there was a need for a more comprehensive theological journal. The "Association of Gentlemen in Princeton," under the direction of Hodge, announced the reorganization of their periodical. It would henceforth carry original items addressed to the pressing concerns of the American church. In subsequent issues this included not only theology and biblical criticism, but psychology and metaphysics, civil politics and church polity, ethics and social trends. Whatsoever concerned the church would be explored. By 1837 its title was changed to *The Princeton Review*.

Hodge rapidly emerged as one of the nineteenth century's most able theologians, but his periodical remained a top priority for him throughout his long career. For forty-six years he served as its chief editor and its most prolific contributor, writing one hundred and forty-two articles of his own which totaled over five thousand pages. Hodge's efforts were joined with those of a vast host of the most eminent Presbyterian churchmen and theologians of his day.

These men were firmly committed to the system of doctrine taught in the Westminster Standards, believing it to be nothing more than the thought of Augustine and Calvin. To their understanding, this was simply the clear teaching of scripture in its most consistent form: it is only by proclaiming that salvation is by grace alone, without qualification, that God is rightly honored and glorified.

The various contributors to the *Princeton Theological Review* attempted to bear witness to their convictions with great breadth of understanding and clarity of thought and style. The result was both conservative and moderate, as A.A. Hodge, Charles' son, has noted. *The Review* was "conservative" because it held that truth is not found in the fads of progressive modern speculations, but it

is discovered through the universal rules of reason applied in obedience to the revealed Word of God in scripture. *The Review* was also "moderate," however, in that its writers to a remarkable degree, due perhaps to Hodge's gentle influence, avoided the fierce party spirit that characterizes so many strongly held convictions. There was generally a large measure of humility, openness, and willingness to admit mistakes.

This is not to say that *The Princeton Review* skirted all conflict. As A.A. Hodge has pointed out, "The Bible is the most controversial of books. It is a protest against sin and error from beginning to end." The Old Princetonians, assured of the truth of their position, welcomed fair criticism and debate.

By the close of Charles Hodge's tenure as editor, the spirit of *The Princeton Theological Review* and the quality of its contributors had earned it a preeminent voice in theological and social discourse. *The British Quarterly Review* stated in 1871: "The Princeton Review is the oldest Quarterly in the United States . . . [and] it is beyond question the greatest purely theological Review that has ever been published in the English tongue."

The Princeton Review sadly became one of the many casualties of the tumultuous events surrounding the 1929 reorganization of Princeton Theological Seminary. In some sense, *Theology Today*, launched in 1944 as an ecumenical organ of the seminary, is a continuation of the old journal, but it differs in many important ways which space will not permit us to discuss here.

The new *Princeton Theological Review*, initiated here, is not an attempt to resurrect its predecessor in its exact form. This is not possible, and is probably not desirable. The present editors and contributors make no pretense to the talent, sophistication, or breadth of a Charles Hodge or a B.B. Warfield. Nor do they intend to simply recapitulate Old Princeton Theology in its exact form, out of some slavish loyalty or retrograde nostalgia. The contributors will, however, have fulfilled their purpose if they are able to give a modern hearing to the timeless Augustinian and Reformed essentials of the Old Princetonians, in a spirit of charity, humility, and openness to debate and correction.

Raymond Cannata is a graduate of Wake Forest University and Princeton Seminary. In addition to winning Princeton Seminary's Robinson prize, this year, Ray has earned a scholarship to continue his studies at Princeton Seminary. Ray has had his work published in a number of journals.

Introductory Editorial:

Good Old-Fashioned Theological Truth-Seeking

Richard Gardiner

This publication has been organized because we are of the conviction that the most important questions in the world are the theological questions. We came to seminary desiring rigorous theological instruction, dialogue and debate. Why? Because it seems to us that at the end of our theological quest we don't simply leave the movie theatre and go home. No. We are very consciously aware that this thing could (and probably does) have eternal consequences. And so we are eager to examine the eternal questions with as much care as we can muster.

Our President often makes the comparison of the study of theology with the study of medicine. It's a good analogy. You see, when we go to the doctor for a prescription, we don't want a doctor who took his studies with a grain of salt:

"Well let's see, from my cursory study of chemicals, I have come to think that different medicines are really not all that different. Here, I'll just give you some of this *yellow stuff*. It sure does make my car tires clean."

Give me a more narrow-minded doctor!

So shouldn't we, too, be taking our "medicine" seriously? Or are we so pre-occupied with "bedside manner" that we neglect the essence of our vocation: theology. Look, I don't care how *sweet* my doctor is, if she doesn't know the difference between codeine and cyanide, then she is useless.

Granted, bedside manner is important, too. But I fear that our seminary focus has been reduced to little but bedside manner.

We wish to deepen the foundation of our training here. Granted, the latest sexual controversies and favorite CD's are fun to talk about in the cafeteria and read about in the *Vineyard*, but we think there are a few things relevant to theology other than sex (or Enya). So the focus of *this* publication is going to be on those tough fundamental questions that ministers and theologians get paid for worrying about: What is true? Does God exist? Who is God? What is the source of truth? What is the Bible? What authority does it have? What does it mean to be a Christian? Why does evil exist? What happens to the soul at death?

Do we think that we have a monopoly on the answers to these questions? *God forbid*. But, unlike many whom we've heard and read, we don't think that our fallibility should prevent us from doing the hard work of investigating the issues as thoroughly as possible, and by God's grace, coming to some conclusions.

That's right, in this publication some will actually dare to put forth ideas with the conviction that they are *true*. This question of *truth* seems particularly acute to us as Christians. For as pertains to salvation, if Christ did not *truly* die and resurrect in triumph over sin, then there is no *true* grace

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nor *true* forgiveness. Was it not Paul who stated the importance of the *historically true*, central fact of Christianity?:

If Christ has not been raised, then our preaching is in vain, your faith is also in vain. . . . If we have hoped in Christ in this life only, we are of all men most to be pitied. . . . If the dead are not raised, let us eat, drink, for tomorrow we die.

(I Corinthians 15:14ff.)

This is why I, for one, take this question of objective truth in theology to be so important --because I am in need of grace--real, *objectively true*, grace.

Those who claim that there is an *objective truth* are often accused of tyranny. On the contrary, the reason for wanting to discover the *truth* of the gospel is so that people may be *truly* saved by the real *mercy* of God, if indeed there really is such thing! And it seems that only a *true* gospel can accomplish that. Thus, we need to know the *truth* about whether there is a God, and if so, whether God is merciful. It seems to me to be the most important question. But modern trends in philosophy and theology, together with recent cultural dynamics, have attempted to divert us from our hope in finding truth.*

We are reminded again and again of the totalitarianism of "absolute truth." Anyone who has seen *Schindler's List* has been vividly exposed to the evils of a people who were absolutely "certain" about their ideology. Auschwitz was dreadful. Those who have come out of horrifying legalistic backgrounds have legitimately become skeptical concerning the idea of *truth*. Granted, if the Germans hadn't been absolutists, then Auschwitz might never have happened. But we must not forget: if the Allies hadn't been absolutists, then Nuremberg would never have happened either! In order to claim that Nazi Germany was truly wrong, then one must first believe that there actually are objective standards of judgment. The editors of this journal *know* for

*This diversion generally originates with Kant's Copernican revolution. See Peter Kreeft, *Making Choices* (Ann Arbor: Servant, 1990), 127. To deny the existence of Objective Truth may seem morally liberating, as well as politically and diplomatically expedient, but it is philosophically and theologically a travesty.

certain that the Nazis were wrong. But the relativists (who are plenteous in our midst) cannot consistently agree with that statement. Thus, if there is a philosophy that should alarm us, it is relativism--the denial of objective standards of judgment. The apostle wrote: "Avoid such people . . . who will listen to anybody and can never arrive at a knowledge of the truth . . . they will not get very far, for their folly will be plain to all."

We do anticipate that many people who read these articles may be apprehensive about our approach and our claims. The way we see it, that shall be glorious, for in that apprehension, constructively expressed, we hope to discover where we are in error, and shall be moved closer to the truth. We came to seminary to learn. So we beg the reader's response--positive or negative--but somebody please say something and stand on it. We have written with great hopes of many responses. It is not the truth we fear, rather it is the fear of truth that we fear.

Don't misinterpret this as a general indictment of the seminary itself. We are all here because we want to be here. And we have found many aspects of our education here to be extremely beneficial. Speaking for myself, I totally adore the environment of this school. On the other hand, it is true that we, like everyone else on campus, have our concerns about the propriety of certain theological directions that are being taken

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here. Yet we do not believe in isolationism or retreatism, but rather in sharpening one another with a dialectic approach. In the marketplace of "voices," we wish to contribute ours.

As this publication is gradually consumed we also realize that there will be those who will take pains to point out the common concerns of our community: some will notice the glaring ratio of male writers to female. This did not happen purposely. We want, and we emphatically invite, all women and men to assist in this work. Some will scrutinize the usage of gender pronouns and be on watch for male-gendered God-language. These are issues about which we are very cognizant, and we implore the dissenting reader to bear with us. The main reason we have taken on this project is to refocus our concerns upon the primary issues of theology rather than the same secondary concerns which have been beat to death again and again. Nevertheless, we realize that some will associate the writers with political issue *x*, *y*, or *z*, and immediately categorize this entire publication as a "rag," in spite of the fact that most of the writers are well-credentialed, top-grade students and scholars.

Then there may be those who will claim that we have some sort of surreptitious goal

to preserve and protect our oppressive economic status with our ideologies. The fact is that all of the contributors to this project barely had enough money to buy the staples on this paper. And we don't really ever expect or hope to be "economic oppressors." As a matter of fact we don't want to be any sort of oppressors. What we want is to see ourselves and our colleagues engaging in some meaningful theology! We offer these commitments:

- 1) A commitment to dialogical learning; in other words, the editors will be prepared to publish and address oppositions to their opinions.

- 2) A commitment to avoid a lot of jargon.

- 3) A commitment to brevity.

- 4) A commitment to relevance: we promise not to bore you.

We really feel that this undertaking will be an excellent addition to the community and we are very appreciative of your interest in this project.

Richard Gardiner earned a degree in Philosophy at the University of Maryland (Magna Cum Laude). After having served as a Director of Christian Education in the Presbyterian Church (USA), Richard is now a third year student at Princeton Theological Seminary and Co-Editor of the Princeton Theological Review.

The Five Points of Calvinism in the Book of Romans

By Mark Makinney

(This article consists of abstracts from a larger work)

God's Verdict: Guilty

The beauty of Paul's letter to the Romans lies in that it speaks to people who believe their election rests upon their ability to behave in a certain manner. They brag about their position with God (2:23) because they uphold the commandments. They believe in the law, so Paul takes their own yardstick and holds them to it. They don't measure up. He walks past their neatly manicured lawns and shines light into the darkness of their cellar.

The good news is that Paul apprises them of the real purpose of the law: *not* to form them into better creatures, but to shut them up into sin. "The law was added so that the trespass might increase" (5:20). The function of the law is to illumine their depravity. Why? So that they might submit to mercy (11:32).

Romans was written to a well-behaved people who lived by a code of ethics, yet they erred in that they "sought to establish their own [righteousness], they did not submit to God's righteousness" (10:3). Without the admission of depravity, as long as one is deceived to believe that one plays any part in one's redemption, Christ death was nice but not necessary; an option perhaps, but not the only means of righteousness.

God's Choice: Unconditional

God hated Esau before Esau was even born. That does not seem fair. How can God be just and yet hate someone before they've done

anything to warrant his wrath. We protest against the Deity. This strikes a blow to our sense of fairness. "Monstrous surely is the madness of the human mind, that it is more disposed to charge God with unrighteousness than to blame itself for blindness" (Calvin).

Paul anticipates this protest by asking in chapter nine, "Is God unjust?" Paul does not engage in an argument about God's justice. His answer is no answer. God does not need our consent to act. "He has mercy on whomever he wills, and he hardens the heart of whomever he wills" (9:18).

God's Atonement: Sufficient

If the elect were chosen (before birth) to be united with Christ, not because they ask forgiveness or turn to God, then Christ's death is a sufficient condition for election to all who are saved. Christ's death alone determines election, not our response. If Christ died for all and all are not saved, then salvation depends on something other than Christ's death. God forbid.

God's Will: Irresistible

"God's gift and his call are irrevocable" (11:30). When Paul asks "who can resist God's will?" (9:19), he implies that no one can. But if our will is indeed free, then even though God can will me to be redeemed, I have the power to resist and thwart God's will. He can want us to be righteous, but we can refuse to cooperate. On the contrary, Paul says we are clay in the potter's hands.

God's Act: Effectual

"To his own master he stands or falls" (14:4), but who determines whether the elect shall stand? The verse continues: "he will stand, for the Lord is able to *make* him stand." If one is elect, the Lord will be one's strength.

Summary

Paul begins by pointing his finger at our thorough sinfulness, then he points to the grace by which we are saved. That is the divine order of our justification. Only as God increasingly makes us aware of the depths of our depravity can we experience grace, no matter how much "good" we do. And as long as we are not aware of the depths of human depravity we will continue to offer a gospel of ethics and rules.

For in those who believe in their own ability to turn to God, there remains the stench of pride and little mercy: "I am a Christian because I turned to God . . . I did it, so there's no excuse for all of you not to be as good as me."

I am a murderous, lustful, greedy, back-biting fellow. I enjoy my sin much too much to ever voluntarily let it go. I hate God. I drive spikes into Christ's hands everyday of my life. God's wrath makes a lot of sense to me, the mystery is in God's mercy.

Mark Makinney is an M.Div. Sr.

Mark's credentials in his concluding paragraph speak for themselves.

Suggested Supplemental Reading Authored by Princeton's Forbears

Jonathan Edwards, *Freedom of the Will*

Charles Hodge, *Systematic Theology*

B.B. Warfield, *Studies in Theology*

Lorraine Boettner, *The Reformed Doctrine of Predestination*

LET'S TALK THEODICY

A Grad-Bar Discussion With Peter DeBaun On The Problem of Evil

Pete DeBaun was interviewed by our feature writer, R. Minneon, concerning his handling of the problem of evil. This interview took place at one of Princeton's most noted theological forums, *The Princeton University Graduate School Bar*. The following is a portion of that lively dialogue:

R. MINNEON: Pete, you must have read about the recent tornados in the South which killed dozens of people, many of whom were worshipping God at the time! Now what should we say about this as theologians? Did God do this?

PETE: Well, what I believe is usually difficult to swallow. In fact the position that I take is difficult for me to swallow.

R. MINNEON: Did God do it?

PETE: Yes. It needs some explanation, but it is the only thing which can be said about evil. Don't misunderstand me, I think it was a very, very ugly, very sad, very overwhelming, truly terrible event. The problem is that I have never found a position that can extricate God from anything and everything that occurs.

R. MINNEON: What?

PETE: In other words, I believe that there are some real problems with my position, that's why this issue is truly a "theodicy." The big problem for me is that the other options are even *worse*. No matter what scenario you draw, you will have to deal with terrible implications. If you don't take my position you are left with either a pathetic God or an apathetic God.

R. MINNEON: How so?

PETE: Well, the tornado happened; it seems to me that either God willed it or God didn't will it. But if God didn't will it, why didn't God stop it? It seems that the essence of all arguments tend to fall into one of two camps: 1) maybe the reason is because God can't do a damn thing about it. But if you say God couldn't stop it—that God's hands were tied—

then you have a pathetic God, compromising God's omnipotence. 2) If God simply says, "I *could* have stopped it but I didn't," then you have an apathetic God, one who is negligent; in which case you haven't solved the problem of God's responsibility. The implications of these positions are more frightening and dangerous than the position that God sovereignly controls evil. How can I trust a God who does not want evil but can't (or refuses to) change it?

R. MINNEON: My position is that God can stop evil, but evil is a consequence of there being free-will in the world. God wants there to be free will, and part of that requires the possibility of evil. When God created Adam, he had free-will, and he could have done right, but he didn't. Now there is evil. But now, in Christ, God will redeem those who freely choose to do right.

PETE: It sounds like God put Adam in the Garden and God was thinking, "come on now, do me right . . . do me right . . . come on now . . . Aw, shucks!!, he bit the apple! Now I'm going to have to do the *Savior* thing!" I must admit, emotionally I like your idea of free will. But as a Christian I can't hold it with integrity. Although we clearly have free-will within normal human capacities (for example: we can choose whether to read our GM assignment or do something intelligent), the grander question is whether we are free from God's causal influence upon our inclinations which will *always* determine

. . . emotionally I like your idea of free will. But as a Christian I can't hold it with integrity.

our choices? I think your insistence on autonomous freedom is your *pride screaming*.

R. MINNEON: What does pride have to do with it?

PETE: Pride seems to me to be the only motivation for insisting upon causal autonomy. Why would God want us to have free will? What does it accomplish?

R. MINNEON: It accomplishes the possibility of love. Without freedom, there can be no love. Robots can't love. As C.S. Lewis

LET'S TALK THEODICY

wrote, there can be no love unless there is the possibility of hate.

PETE: Well let me ask you something then. In heaven, will we be free?

R. MINNEON: Certainly.

PETE: Then there will be the possibility of hate in heaven!?

R. MINNEON: There may be the possibility, but there won't be any.

PETE: Are you certain that there will not be any?

R. MINNEON: Yes, of course.

PETE: I agree. But, in effect, what you are saying is that there is no possibility for hate. According to your own definition of freedom, there won't be any freedom in heaven, since hate *cannot* be there.

R. MINNEON: What I am saying is that God is not a rapist, God does not violate our freedom. God is respectful of our choices.

PETE: That sounds really good, but even if God is good-mannered, you still can't get

Before creation even existed, all of history was in the mind's eye of God. If evil was never intended, God goofed.

around the fact that God is still the one who has created all the parameters of the person; every cell of the person, every inclination, all are in the hands of God. Nothing escapes God's causal authority. Before creation even existed, all of history was in the mind's eye of God. If evil was never intended, God goofed.

R. MINNEON: Are you saying that God is the cause of evil?

PETE: The question you have to answer is whether God did or did not know evil was going to happen before it happened. If God knows it will happen, and then creates it as such, then God is ultimately the cause of evil.

R. MINNEON: Why do we have to have such a strong view of omniscience and foreknowledge? Perhaps God, for the sake of love, limits his knowledge so that there can be true freedom. I can do without the idea of

omniscience.

PETE: You are very smart, you have solved the problem. But if God doesn't know the future, divine "whoops" is possible. The problem with your position is this: you now have to trust in a God who often gets *surprised* by the world. God says, "Oops, Oh My!!, What??--a tornado hit the church?! What? How'd that happen?" If God can't see it, God is out of control.

R. MINNEON: Yes, but through that tragedy, God will provide redemption and comfort. God doesn't control it or cause it, but God helps us deal with evil.

PETE: So God is no longer the Author of history, but the Janitor--trying to clear up situations that he can't control? (or perhaps won't control?)

R. MINNEON: The biblical view of God is of one that weeps and loves. You seem to ignore that kind of God for a more Greek, philosophical, static conception of God.

PETE: Hey, I'll give you "a weeping God" all day long. But God doesn't weep because God is a helpless victim of human choices. Is God afraid of us? I'm simply trying to show you what the implications of your position are, regardless of their origin.

R. MINNEON: I'd like to talk with you more on this. Can we discuss this again?

PETE: Sure. I really want to say, however, that my whole goal is to look at the theodicy issue in a brand new way. I am not suggesting that we ought to coarsely tell suffering people that God wants them to suffer. I simply want you to understand what the implications are if you separate any event from God's causal agency. We can either, like Job, worship God in the midst of evil, without compromising God's sovereignty; or we can compromise God's sovereignty and worship a pathetic or an apathetic God. For me, I have chosen Job's position.

R. MINNEON: I'll have to think about this.

PETE: Right on. Let me get you another *Lone Star*.

Look for more dialogues with Peter in upcoming editions of the Princeton Theological Review.

Special Feature

The Fallacy of Contextualism

William A. Dembski

In the last several decades both philosophy and theology have increasingly taken a “contextual turn.” The contextual turn begins with the observation that all of human inquiry occurs within contexts. By itself this observation is perfectly innocuous. It is patently obvious that each of us thinks and moves within certain social, linguistic, and epistemic contexts. We are not disembodied spirits living in a Platonic heaven, but flesh and blood people living at certain concrete times and places.

The observation that all human inquiry occurs within contexts (and is thereby constrained by contexts) is uncontroversial. Nevertheless, controversy does arise when we move beyond this simple observation, and embrace the dogma that all human inquiry is inescapably imprisoned within and thereby incorrigibly skewed by contexts. It is one thing to admit that inquiry occurs within contexts and is thereby constrained by contexts. It is quite another to assert that contexts so bias inquiry that our beliefs about the world are invariably warped.

Thus we see the contextual turn taking two forms, one moderate, the other hard-core. Of these I am entirely in sympathy with the moderate turn. Indeed, I regard human inquiry as functioning essentially within contexts, and thus regard the recent elevation of the epistemic status of contexts as salutary for the field of epistemology. In particular, moderate contextualism, as we may call it, uncovers the pretensions of positivism, which in line with the Enlightenment vision of reason, claims the ability to settle all our questions at the bar of Reason writ large. Against this inflated view of human reason, moderate contextualism affirms that all instances of human inquiry occur within contexts and must therefore acknowledge the role of contexts in shaping how we view the world. Reason functions within context and cannot be divorced from context. According to moderate contextualism, reason is to context as

soul is to body. Objectivity is not lost by acknowledging the role that background information, or equivalently contexts, play in shaping how we acquire new information and thereby learn about the world. Moderate contextualism, while acknowledging the obvious, does not open the door to unbridled skepticism or relativism.

Moderate contextualism as the view that all human inquiry occurs within and is constrained by contexts is unproblematic. Even what Christians regard as humankind’s chief truth, that God in Christ assumed human form to redeem the world, cannot be divorced from the time, place, history, and culture within which Jesus moved. Jesus was not a Platonic ideal being, but a Jew. If we fail to understand Jesus’ Jewish roots, we fail to understand the Gospel. The problem with the contextual turn, however, occurs when this moderate contextualism is transformed into hard-core contextualism by being universalized and absolutized in the same way that reason was itself absolutized in the Enlightenment. It is the absolutization of contextualism that constitutes hard-core contextualism and results in what I call the “fallacy of contextualism.” It is against this absolutized form of contextualism that I am arguing in this essay.

With hard-core contextualism far more is at stake than the unproblematic claim that inquiry occurs within and is constrained by contexts. By adding that inquiry is always imprisoned within and thereby incorrigibly skewed by contexts, hard-core contextualism entails that we are irremediably barred from obtaining accurate, univocal knowledge of the world. Thus according to hard-core contextualism, our knowledge is always biased, skewed, and theory-laden. Alternatively, our knowledge of the world is always a fictive construction to which we must ever add the disclaimer “but of course we don’t really know what’s going on.”

Now there is problem with adding to all our assertions the disclaimer “but of course we don’t really know what’s going on.” For if we don’t really know what’s going on, then we don’t really know *that* we don’t really what’s going on. G. K. Chesterton put it this way: “We don’t know enough about the unknown to know that it’s unknowable.” Here then in a nutshell is the fallacy of contextualism. It is the fallacy that results from asserting with too much confidence that there is nothing about which we can legitimately have confidence. It is the fallacy of knowing too much about the very thing that’s supposed to be an object of ignorance. It is the fallacy of trying to have your cake and eat it too.

The fallacy of contextualism is a fallacy of self-referential incoherence. Hard-core contextualism makes a universal claim, and therefore can be applied to itself. Nevertheless, when applied to itself, hard-core contextualism strips itself of any claims to universality: Is all of our thinking irremediably biased by context? Then what about the very claim that all our thinking is irremediably biased by context? And in what context is this claim being made? As hard-core contextualists are we not all too biased in making such claims about contexts, and if so, might we not simply be committing a conceptual error, having made the claim simply because we are part of a secular culture (= context) that has bought into unbridled skepticism and relativism?

When cast in this light, the fallacy inherent in hard-core contextualism becomes immediately apparent. Still it is amazing the different forms this fallacy takes and the vast number of reputed thinkers who continue to take it seriously. The next thing I want to do therefore is present a few concrete examples of this fallacy in action. Having presented these examples, I then want to draw several conclusions both about the proper place of moderate contextualism in theology and philosophy, and the proper way to safeguard theology and philosophy from the fallacy inherent in hard-core contextualism.

Consider the following blurb on the back cover of Ronald Thiemann’s recent book *Constructing a Public Theology* (the blurb is by William Placher and serves as an endorsement for the book):

In a pluralistic society . . . no set of theological or philosophical first principles provides a starting point on which everyone can agree. . . . Thoughtful Christians in particular want to make their voices heard in public debate without opening themselves up to charges of trying to impose their agenda on everyone else.¹

Prima facie, this statement appears innocuous—nay, even tolerant and generous. In our pluralistic society we have grown accustomed to the notion that everything is up for grabs. Indeed, for any claim made, someone else seems ever ready to advance a counterclaim. Cicero’s dictum has, as it were, come home to us with a vengeance, to wit, “there is nothing so absurd but that some philosopher has said it.” And in our day, everyone is a philosopher.

Now while it is perfectly true that our society no longer adheres to any common first principles on which a consensus exists, it does not follow that society should abjure the search for a common set of first principles or consider it somehow progressive that first principles are now regarded as passé. Let me stress that a society’s search for or adherence to first principles does not entail a return to classical foundationalism in epistemology, to positivism in science, or to the glorification of reason à la the Enlightenment. Presumably our society itself constitutes a context within which common purposes and goals can be worked out. For this reason it seems artificial to proscribe, prior to any discussion or analysis, the search for such principles by the society. Without such a discussion and analysis, we simply don’t know whether a society’s search for first principles is doomed to fail.

In this light let us reconsider Placher’s claim that “In a pluralistic society . . . no set of theological or philosophical first principles provides a starting point on which everyone can agree.” Placher is making more than a simple statement of fact. Indeed, he is not just claiming that the members of our pluralistic society do not agree on any theological or philosophical first principles. The latter claim is certainly true, but holds little philosophical interest

¹Ronald F. Thiemann, *Constructing a Public Theology* (Louisville, Kentucky: Westminster/John Knox, 1991), back cover.

1. The first part of the paper is devoted to a discussion of the general principles of the theory of the structure of the atom.

2. In the second part of the paper, the author discusses the question of the structure of the atom, taking into account the results of the experiments of Rutherford and his colleagues.

3. In the third part of the paper, the author discusses the question of the structure of the atom, taking into account the results of the experiments of Bohr and his colleagues.

4. In the fourth part of the paper, the author discusses the question of the structure of the atom, taking into account the results of the experiments of Heisenberg and his colleagues.

5. In the fifth part of the paper, the author discusses the question of the structure of the atom, taking into account the results of the experiments of Schrödinger and his colleagues.

6. In the sixth part of the paper, the author discusses the question of the structure of the atom, taking into account the results of the experiments of Dirac and his colleagues.

7. In the seventh part of the paper, the author discusses the question of the structure of the atom, taking into account the results of the experiments of Pauli and his colleagues.

8. In the eighth part of the paper, the author discusses the question of the structure of the atom, taking into account the results of the experiments of Einstein and his colleagues.

9. In the ninth part of the paper, the author discusses the question of the structure of the atom, taking into account the results of the experiments of de Broglie and his colleagues.

10. In the tenth part of the paper, the author discusses the question of the structure of the atom, taking into account the results of the experiments of Compton and his colleagues.

11. In the eleventh part of the paper, the author discusses the question of the structure of the atom, taking into account the results of the experiments of Davisson and his colleagues.

12. In the twelfth part of the paper, the author discusses the question of the structure of the atom, taking into account the results of the experiments of Thomson and his colleagues.

13. In the thirteenth part of the paper, the author discusses the question of the structure of the atom, taking into account the results of the experiments of Millikan and his colleagues.

since our society contains many criminals and mentally deranged individuals to whom philosophers and theologians will not, at least in their academic writing, give the time of day.

At issue is not the obvious fact that the members of our society don't agree on anything. Rather, it is the claim that we are in principle barred from reaching agreement. In this way our *inability to agree* is itself elevated to a first principle. If you will, this becomes a first principle: *societies are properly speaking pluralistic and therefore cannot have first principles*. Such a first principle is of course self-referentially incoherent. If a society accepts that "no set of theological or philosophical first principles provides a starting point on which everyone can agree," then that society does indeed have such a first principle. If an individual claims that any search for first principles is doomed to failure, then this individual has already found such a first principle (the claim itself becomes a first principle).

Self-referential incoherence is typically greeted with amusement once it is exposed. Nevertheless, we need to recognize that whenever an argument founders on self-referential incoherence, there is a serious problem with that argument. Indeed, whole schools of philosophy have crumbled under the weight of self-referential incoherence. Among these I would point out the failure of Frege's logicism for mathematics as a result of the Russell paradox, the failure of Hilbert's program for showing that every mathematical claim is decidable as a result of Gödel's theorems, and the failure of logical positivism as a result of the self-refuting nature of its verificationist theory of meaning.

If Placher is asserting that the search for theological or philosophical first principles is a doomed enterprise, then Placher is guilty of self-referential incoherence. His claim therefore has no logically compelling force, and any conclusions he draws from this claim become unsupportable and suspect. Thus when Placher concludes, "Thoughtful Christians in particular want to make their voices heard in public debate without opening themselves up to charges of trying to impose their agenda on everyone else," this conclusion must be evaluated on its own merits, and not as a consequence of a self-referentially incoherent first principle that by *fiat* bars first principles

tout court. On its own merits, however, Placher's conclusion carries little weight. The references to "thoughtful Christians" and "impose their agenda" are rhetorical moves designed to distinguish the good guys from the bad guys, i.e., those who embrace Placher's pluralism and those who, like myself, eschew it. Thus if we are to take Placher seriously, the evangelization of the Roman empire by the early Christians (to whom the epithet "thoughtful Christians" certainly cannot be denied), would have involved the "imposition of an agenda."

Perhaps I'm being a bit obsessive, working to death a mere blurb of endorsement on the back of a book cover. Nevertheless, as a blurb of endorsement it indicates to what extent the theological community is prepared to accept the fallacy of contextualism, and with it the relativism and radical skepticism entailed by hard-core contextualism. After all, it is the content of a book, not the blurb endorsing it, that is supposed to issue in controversy.

But then again Placher is not saying anything that Thiemann does not espouse and develop in the body of his book. For instance, on the question of pluralism, Thiemann comments:

Political and cultural diversity is a gift to be nurtured and celebrated. The freedom upon which such diversity is based is particularly precious and must be preserved and extended to those who have been excluded from full participation in a free society.²

In elevating pluralism to a first principle, Thiemann is guilty of the worst sort of special pleading. Thiemann's pluralism has no room for intolerant chaps like myself who think Christianity makes exclusive truth claims that are binding on the world at large. And yet, Thiemann's pluralism is to be accorded sacrosanct status as a guiding principle of society. Woe to anyone who opposes it. Call it pluralism, but I call it imperialism.

Next, let us consider a contextual fallacy that occurs all too frequently in contemporary literary theory. Once again Ronald Thiemann lays out the fallacy, though this time without giving his assent to it. Thus he describes the following views that have become commonplace in literary circles:

²Thiemann, p. 47.

- (1) Literary texts are indeterminable and thus inevitably yield multiple, irreducibly diverse interpretations.
- (2) There can be no criteria for preferring one reading to another and [thus we are] cast into the darkest of hermeneutical nights in which all readings are indistinguishably gray.³

I find it helpful to set claims like this apart in the way I have done here. Indeed, if one reads claims like this within the flow of a paragraph, their self-referential incoherence is likely to be lost. But set apart as they are here, their self-referential incoherence becomes strikingly evident.

Although (2) is supposed to make a more radical claim than (1), both quickly run into difficulties when we turn the hermeneutic questions they raise back on themselves. Is the hermeneuticist who asserts either (1) or (2) ready to admit that what he or she is asserting is itself indeterminate? Do (1) and (2) admit no semantic boundaries? In all likelihood a hermeneuticist who asserts claims like (1) and (2) wants to be taken seriously and wants the semantic range of (1) and (2) narrowly constrained. Thus for a philosophical subversive like myself to come along and interpret these claims differently from their plain sense would be deemed unacceptable. But what if I choose to interpret claims (1) and (2) as saying respectively the following:

- (1') Literary texts are determinable and thus yield a single, univocal interpretation corresponding to the original intention of the author.
- (2') There are sharp criteria for preferring one reading to another and thus we can always avoid the darkest of hermeneutical nights. All readings are either black or white.

Let me emphasize that I'm not endorsing (1') or (2'). My point is simply that if one starts out by taking (1) and (2) seriously, then (1') and (2') become *legitimate readings* of (1) and (2) respectively, with the result that it becomes impossible to take (1) and (2) seriously. In this way deconstruction becomes a tool not just for deconstructing texts but also for deconstructing itself.

And this is why deconstruction is at base an intellectual subterfuge. The key theoretical problem facing the literary theorist is to

characterize the relation that obtains between the reader of a text and the text itself. In the classical conception meanings inhere in texts and that the reader's job is to dig out the meaning from the text, the meaning of the text typically being identified with the intention of the author. Deconstructionists, on the other hand, start by assuming that any meaning associated with texts is so underdetermined as to issue in "endless labyrinths of possible meanings."⁴ Deconstruction therefore "invites readers to approach texts creatively and to appreciate their ability to generate an unlimited plurality of meaningful effects."⁵

The key word in the last sentence is "creatively." Because the meaning of the text is so unconstrained, the reader must create the meaning rather than discover it. And yet the writings of deconstructionists do themselves constitute texts which can be read deconstructively. But of course Derrida and his disciples do not want the texts they write deconstructed in the way they are advocating that other texts be deconstructed (i.e., something like what I was doing above when I reinterpreted sentence (1) as sentence (1')). Rather they want their texts taken seriously and read non-deconstructively. Only after their own work is taken seriously and read using a classical hermeneutic do they enjoin the reader to read everything else deconstructively. This is not so much a logical fallacy as sheer hypocrisy.⁶

The fallacy of contextualism is frequently tied to a faulty view of language. This faulty view of language comes up repeatedly in feminist theology, where it is used as a tool for systematically transforming traditional God-talk. Let us therefore turn to a particularly apt expression of this faulty view of language as enunciated by the feminist theologian Elizabeth Johnson:

⁴Mark A. Powell, *What is Narrative Criticism* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1990), p. 17.

⁵Ibid.

⁶For a general treatment of deconstruction see Christopher Norris, *Deconstruction: Theory and Practice* (London: Methuen, 1982).

³Thiemann, p. 45-46.

There has been no timeless speech about God in the Jewish or Christian tradition. Rather, words about God are cultural creatures, entwined with the mores and adventures of the faith community that uses them. As cultures shift, so too does the specificity of God-talk.⁷

Certainly languages are evolving, living entities—one has only to compare the King James version of the Bible with more recent translations into English to see how much our language has changed in the last 400 years. Words change their meanings over time. Grammar changes over time. Even logic and rhetoric change over time. What's more, language itself is thoroughly conventional. What a word means depends on convention and can be changed by convention. For instance, there is nothing intrinsic about the word "automobile" that demands the word denote a car. If we go with its Latin etymology, we might just as well have applied "automobile" to human beings, who are after all "self-propelling" also. There is nothing sacred about the form a word assumes. For instance, "gift" in English means a present, in German it means poison, and in French it means nothing at all. And of course, words only make sense within the context of broader units of discourse like whole narratives.

No one who reflects on the matter thinks language is in any way fixed or ossified. But then again this is not Elizabeth Johnson's point. Her aim is to develop a feminist theology in which she can be justified referring to God in the feminine, i.e., as "she." The very title of her book leaves no doubt on this point: *She Who Is*. But how does Johnson justify such a change in our language about God? It certainly isn't enough to say that language evolves, that words are conventional, and that the meaning of language depends on context. Rather, Johnson needs the much stronger notion that language is incapable of conveying enduring senses which are expressible over time and translatable from the past into the present.

Where then is the fallacy of contextualism in all this? In denying that there is "timeless speech about God in the Jewish or Christian tradition," Johnson certainly does not mean that her own pronouncements about the nature of language and the impossibility of timeless

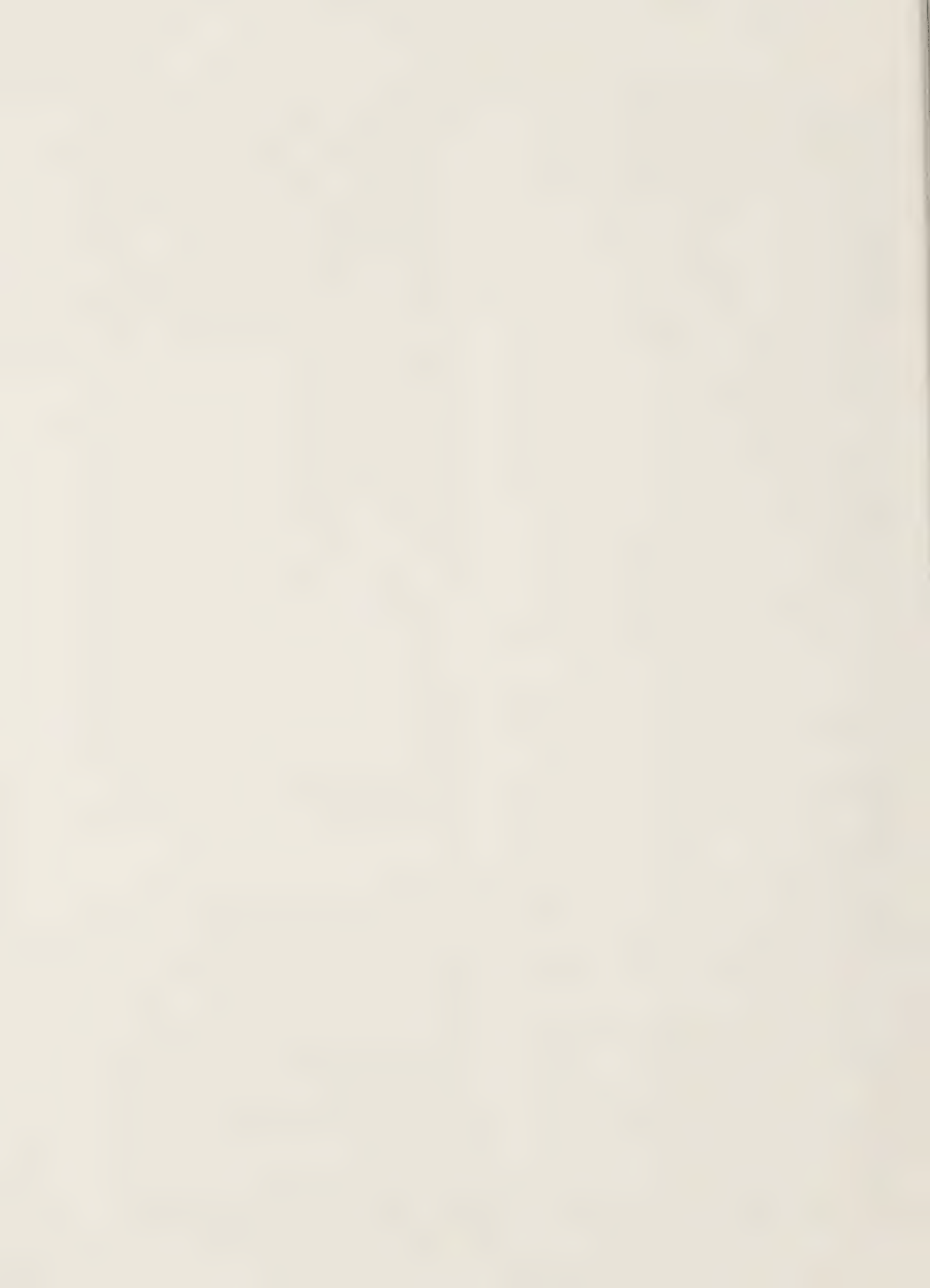
speech about God are not to be taken in a timeless sense. The problem is that if language is incapable of expressing "timeless senses," then any claim about language which claims language cannot express timeless senses becomes uninterpretable and meaningless. Language is evolving. The publication date of Johnson's book is 1992. It is now 1994. At least two years have elapsed since Johnson wrote the above passage which denies such a thing as timeless speech. How then can I know what Johnson meant two years ago if language cannot convey timeless senses?

But that was only two years ago, you say. Then please explain to me what distinguishes the two years since the publication of Johnson's *She Who Is* from the two-thousand years since the publication of the Gospel. Why should we not attach the same disclaimer to Johnson's writings which she seems to attach to the Scriptures, namely, that her writings have no timeless sense? Is it because Johnson and we are part of the same culture? But she is a feminist theologian and I am an evangelical mathematician. What then does it mean to say we are part of the same culture? Indeed, theologically I view myself as much closer to Paul and the New Testament than I do to Johnson and her form of feminist theology. I submit therefore that Johnson's denial that language can convey timeless senses is incoherent. If language cannot express timeless senses, then speech occurring two seconds ago or two millennia ago are equally inaccessible to our cognitive faculties.

Having now described the fallacy of contextualism in some detail and given a few concrete examples showing how this fallacy operates in practice, I want in this final portion of the essay to turn to a somewhat different question, namely, What is it that keeps this fallacy alive? As a strictly logical matter, the fallacy of contextualism represents an egregious blunder which once noted can be duly dismissed. Nevertheless, the persistence with which this fallacy rears its head, and the multiplicity of guises which it assumes should lead us to ponder why it is that this fallacy keeps being reincarnated.

Once Aristotle formulated his logic, there was no longer any question about whether a given syllogism was valid or invalid. Moreover,

⁷Elizabeth A. Johnson, *She Who Is* (New York: Crossroad, 1992), p. 6.



anyone who proposed an invalid syllogism was henceforth laughed to scorn and considered an uneducated boor. Not so the purveyors of the contextual fallacy. They remain some of the brightest lights on the literary, philosophical, and theological landscape. How is it that they manage to keep their reputations intact despite committing what on closer examination is an inexcusable error?

To be sure, the error is often concealed, being cloaked in a morass of terminology and notation. Yet at other times the contextual fallacy is not so much concealed as proclaimed and celebrated. This is likely to occur in those theologies that revel in contradiction and think faith cannot be faith unless it embraces the absurd, as though logical clarity and precision were somehow inimical to faith.

A thorough-going pragmatism often underlies the fallacy of contextualism. If all that is interesting is happening in my own little context, and if no one outside my context is entitled to rebuke or correct me, then the fallacy of contextualism serves to affirm my way of life and give me the autonomy to do as I please. Autonomy and self-determination are watchwords of our age. They are the principal goals of self-realization. They are psychological desiderata to which the American Psychiatric and Psychological Associations give their seal of approval. Pragmatism as it were tells us, "Yes it is a logical fallacy, but it feels so good. It lets me do what I want. It is liberating. How can something that feels so right be so logically wrong?" And so we are encouraged not to take the fallacy too seriously. It does useful work. It encourages pluralism and diversity. It keeps us in step with the times.

It seems, however, that there is a deeper issue at stake here, deeper than the rationalizations offered by pragmatists on behalf of the fallacy, and deeper also than the logical critique offered against the fallacy earlier in this essay. The deeper issue concerns both the nature of contexts and the nature of human rationality. Hard-core contextualism and the fallacy of contextualism that it engenders view contexts as essentially bent in on themselves. According to hard-core contextualism, contexts are autonomous little worlds alienated from other contexts and incapable of interacting coherently with them. Hard-core contextualism, as it were, takes the

alienation humans experience on account of sin and corruption, and elevates it to a philosophical principle. For Augustine the sin and corruption of the self consisted in the self being bent in on itself. Hard-core contextualism elevates, glorifies, and transfigures this corruption, taking the contexts in which humans live, move, and have their being, and turning them in on themselves.

This is bad. As Christians we live, move, and have our being in God. We are therefore not to have our vision focused on our own little contexts, but rather to open our contexts to God and the world. In short, we are to be in communion with other contexts. The Christian view of contexts and human rationality is therefore quite different from the view advanced by hard-core contextualism. On the Christian view, contexts are not bent in on themselves, but are fundamentally open, embracing the world and seeking to learn from it. Yes, we operate within contexts; but we are able also to reflect on our contexts and broaden the scope of our contexts so as to embrace and enter other contexts. Reinhold Niebuhr referred to this ability of ours as "self-transcendence."⁸

There is no context which God does not simultaneously inhabit and transcend. At the root of the fallacy of contextualism is the notion that we can have our own little world into which no one else can intrude, not even God. Pride undergirds this thirst for autonomy, this desire to be masters of our own little worlds. Curiously, though this thirst for autonomy is almost always advertised as setting us free, it invariably accomplishes the opposite. For the autonomy that bends contexts in on themselves is an autonomy of isolation and solitary confinement. This sort of autonomy is wholly incompatible with the freedom offered to humanity by God in Christ. Instead of imprisoning us in our contexts, God has created us so that we can interact with and learn from other contexts.

Christianity has never been a religion of the self. The first commandment is a commandment to worship God and God alone. Corrupted as it is by sin, the self, when it turns in on itself,

⁸See book I, chapter 1 of Reinhold Niebuhr, *The Nature and Destiny of Man* (New York: Charles Scribner's, 1949).

discovers nothing of enduring hope or value. To see this, one has only to consider the logical outworkings of religions which do make the self rather than God the center of their attentions. In both Hinduism and Buddhism "the chief end of man" (to use a phrase from the Westminster catechism) is not "to glorify God and enjoy him forever," but to have the self absorbed into Brahman or annihilated in the void so that it can escape the weary cycle of reincarnation. In either case the goal is to do away with personal identity.

To this the Westminster catechism responds that "the chief end of man is to glorify God and enjoy him forever." But how is this goal to be accomplished? The eighth chapter of Mark's Gospel begins to answer this question: "If any want to become my followers, let them deny themselves and take up their cross and follow me. For those who want to save their life will lose it, and those who lose their life for my sake, and for the sake of the gospel, will save it." (Mark 8:34-35) Our first step then is not to turn in on ourselves, but to turn outward and to God.

But once we have turned outward and to God, where do we go? To this Gregory of Nyssa responds that we go on to perfection—yet a form of perfection that is dynamic and progressive rather than static. For Gregory of Nyssa perfection is identified with ever-increasing growth in the knowledge of God. Indeed, as finite beings perfection is never something we attain once and for all. Rather perfection is a matter of continuing growth in the knowledge of God. Now this view of Christian perfection is

incompatible with any view of contexts which treats them as isolated, mutually inaccessible compartments.

In conclusion, let me offer a few predictions about what we can expect from the fallacy of contextualism in the future. First, I predict that this fallacy will not go away, despite brilliant refutations of it like the one you have just read. The practical benefits of this fallacy are simply too great for people to let mere trifles like *logic* and *truth* get in the way and prevent them from enjoying its benefits. Second, we can expect ever more sophisticated versions of this fallacy, which are so richly ornamented in terminology, notation, and all manner of scholarly appurtenances that the job of exposing the fallacy of contextualism will require increasing care and diligence. Third and last, I predict that hard-core contextualism will be employed with increasing vigor as a weapon against traditional Christian thinking. The attack will come chiefly in the name of pluralism, diversity, and tolerance, and will challenge Christianity at every point where Christianity stands in opposition to the secularization of culture and society. To put the matter in a by now familiar idiom, the goal will be to transform the Christian context into the secular context. In this respect Romans 12:1-2 provides a decisive corrective.

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Whose History?

by Robert W. Lawrence

Christianity is a religion that finds its roots and norms in the events of history. The events of Christ's life and the history that flows from his life, both preceding and following, are the means we have been given in order that we might know God. The Christian faith is not then an abstraction that we can pool from some sort of a common religious consciousness of all humanity, or even a common experience of history, but is derived from the particular

events of a given history. From this it cannot be separated. God is revealed in history.

Some clarification of this idea is needed since I am not simply stating that as temporal beings we know things in time. That would be tautological and not worthy of stating. Instead, we must dwell on the fact that history is the divine creation, and move toward a clear understanding of revelation. To say that God is Creator is not merely to assert that He is the initiator of the beginning of time, the divine originator. He is not creator for a moment, but is creator of every moment. God brought all things into being, and without Him nothing was made that was made. To deny this is to assert another creator, some other co-eternal being with God

that could co-fashion the creature.

History then is the creative self-expression of the divine life. In that which is not-God, God makes Himself known. But is that not the definition of revelation? Revelation is God presenting His being to us in something which He is not. But this presentation is creation, and creation is revelation. History is revelation.

This is meant specifically to undermine the traditional view of revelation as some sort of in-breaking of the supernatural into the natural, whether this be called 'miracle' or 'oracle', etc (*i.e.*, Hodge or Warfield on the nature of Christ's works). The idea of the suspension of natural laws and order at the arbitrary divine whim, or of miracles as vindication of the divine is to misunderstand the scope of the divine creative act. To say that God is creator in the way we have defined it above, a definition with which Hodge and Warfield would have been quite happy, is to further say that no event is un-natural. Each and every particular moment of history is proceeds from the creative power of God. The idea of a miracle, if defined as the direct dependence of an event on God, is seemingly applicable to every moment of history. This nature is not somehow something God needs to overcome in order to be known, but is the very means by which He has moved out of Himself into finite expression.

Now, to quote another, "... since it remains eternally true that [nature] can only do what it does through God, and without Him would not be able to exist, let alone do anything, so, the appearance of the natural can never remove the supernatural in nature, and it should not repress the supernatural in our consideration of nature" (J.S. Drey, *Apologetik* I.21; translated by Wayne Fehr in *The Birth of Catholic Tübingen*, p.36). What is meant here is that the creation bears witness to the divine by virtue of being created by the divine. But the problem presented by just such a statement, and the ideas that have lead up to that statement, is the 'how' of determining the content of that revelation, or the meaning of history. No event standing alone speaks for itself. Events are understood by the ideas given to the mind, and by the events' surrounding context. In a typical historical study this involves investigation into the socio-political, intellectual, economic, psychological, etc. factors that led or contribute to the existence of a certain event (*i.e.*, the

conversion of St. Augustine). We break down the particular moments of his life to that point as best we can, looking for the threads that tie those moments together and would lead to his conversion. Thus we try to understand who Augustine is and why he converted through the events by which he made himself known, and against which he defined himself.

But if we take just such an approach with the divine life in history we run into the problem that God is not known in a few brief points in history, but instead we must investigate all of history to see how He has defined Himself (since all history is the creative self-expression of the divine). We are no longer allowed to look at events as isolated occurrences, or even simply connect them with their immediate surroundings, as if they were accidental or haphazard, occurring only by the concurrence of random events. History has to be viewed from a larger perspective; taking what we know we must break it down into its particularities, and like before, try to understand the thread or idea that binds the particularities together. It is these ideas that give us insight into who God is.

Specifically, we find that God has revealed Himself in salvation history which is understood within the larger universal history. Following the basic Christian intuition, meditated to us by the power of the Holy Spirit, we encounter in this history nothing less than the God who wishes to reconcile us to Himself. As we trace the ideas through Jewish history, and Christian history we see the need for reconciliation to overcome the state of sin and alienation and the necessity of the sacrifice of the divine Lamb (*Agnus Dei*). The history of ancient Israel, Jesus of Nazareth and His Church are the outpouring or unfolding of that idea (the *Agnus Dei* among others) into History. In the movement of salvation history the divine life is reflected.

But just because I have dwelt on the specificity of salvation history do not think that I have ignored universal history. Salvation history, in order to be understood in its fullest, should not be approached apart from the larger movement of universal history, from which it has taken various forms of expression. No isolationism can be allowed, for the whole has been given and provides the context for understanding the most important part, namely salvation history. Salvation history will be a

perversion of itself if isolated from the whole, and will degenerate into unintelligibility.

Finally, one last item needs discussion, for we do not stand in a position to see the whole movement of history but stand instead in the limited vantage point of being in time itself. Thus even if we could understand the inner necessity of the movement of all time up until now, we would be confronted with the question of how to proceed into the future. We have seen elements of mobility and stability in the development of Christian self-understanding, and now as we prepare to venture into the unknown (always living in the promise that it is as God wills) it is difficult to see what is the essence of Christianity as we are forced to define ourselves anew. But this is done in constant awareness that even as we re-evaluate our doctrinal heritage (especially in the scriptures, Councils and Fathers/Saints/Doctors of the Church) it is not to be contravened or discarded because it arose by the power of the same Spirit which continues to guide the Church still. We are then trying to live out the same ideas and decrees which have been unfolding in the Church since its inception.

In this process we must avoid two extremes, the first of which is hyper-orthodoxy (I take the term from Dr. Bradford Hinze, Marquette). In hyper-orthodoxy an historical-ly particular manifestation of the idea or divine decree is mistaken for its eternal essence. By failing to develop in accordance with the true essence, doctrinal positions or authoritative statements (whether it be *sola scriptura* or a Council which is cherished at the cost of the Spirit's movement into a fuller pronouncement) becomes a dead letter instead of a living Word. Lagging behind the truth is a result of either a lack of the Spirit's activity or of a corruption of the constant development of the religious principle. Thus we do not criticize the tradition or a doctrinal expression in order to return to the 'purity of the first century church', but instead express the inner necessity for the decree to better represent the heart of Christianity (and, thus, the Sacred Heart of God).

On the other hand we must also avoid the error of heterodoxy, heresy or hyper-fluidity. This begins as an opinion, not in keeping with the essence of Christianity, (the ideas or decrees that were found in the original investigation of history) that is expressed by an individual, and culminates with this

"extraneous element [becoming] organized within the Church . . ." (Schleiermacher, *Brief Outline of Theology*, sections 58; see also 58-62). It is the effort to construe that which is essential as non-essential or the non-essential as in opposition to the essential. Thus heterodoxy is the attempt to close the faith off from its constitutive past by denying that past its normative role as revelation (rejection of the normative nature of closed authorities, *i.e.*, Scripture, the Councils, etc.).

Theological orthodoxy lies as the *via media* between these two extremes. We must latch on to what has been given as God's self-expression, and continue to follow out its intellectual development within the Church. We must continue to discern how the iconographic units of liturgy and doctrine are to be maintained while continuing to develop the idea they reveal. We exist at the dynamic and ambiguous point where historical work is of the essence and systematic thought as the expression of that history must be undertaken with care and reverence for the One for whose glory it is undertaken. Our identity, it must be remembered, lies with the Spirit who formed us in the past and continues to shape us as we move into the future. Each age must synthesize the eternal idea and the fluid presentation. This is orthodoxy.

In conclusion, let us recall that as Christians the history to which we owe allegiance is God's History. In it we find the divine decrees or ideas which unfold in time, giving us revelation of the divine life. And today it is this divine life to which we must continue to be true and which we must continue to explore in our historical and systematic theology.

Robert Lawrence is an M.Div. Sr. and will be continuing his studies toward a Ph.D. in history of doctrine.

Question: When Charles Hodge was a student at Princeton Seminary, where was his dorm room?

Answer: 219 Alexander Hall

The Crisis of Biblical Authority

by Galen Johnson

It is the best selling book in the history of the world, yet few people actually read it. I grew up accustomed to calling it the *Word of God*, but now some would question on what basis I might make such an assertion. The Bible has been the foundation for Christian creeds and professions of faith for centuries, but many now feel it to be only a suggestion of how we ought to live—after all, we live in a vastly different world from that of the biblical writers, so we must take all of what they said with a grain of salt, right? The author of Genesis thought that the earth was the center of the universe, the gospel writers may have believed that diseases are caused by spirits, and Paul was not familiar with the medical ethics questions which surround twentieth century debates about euthanasia.

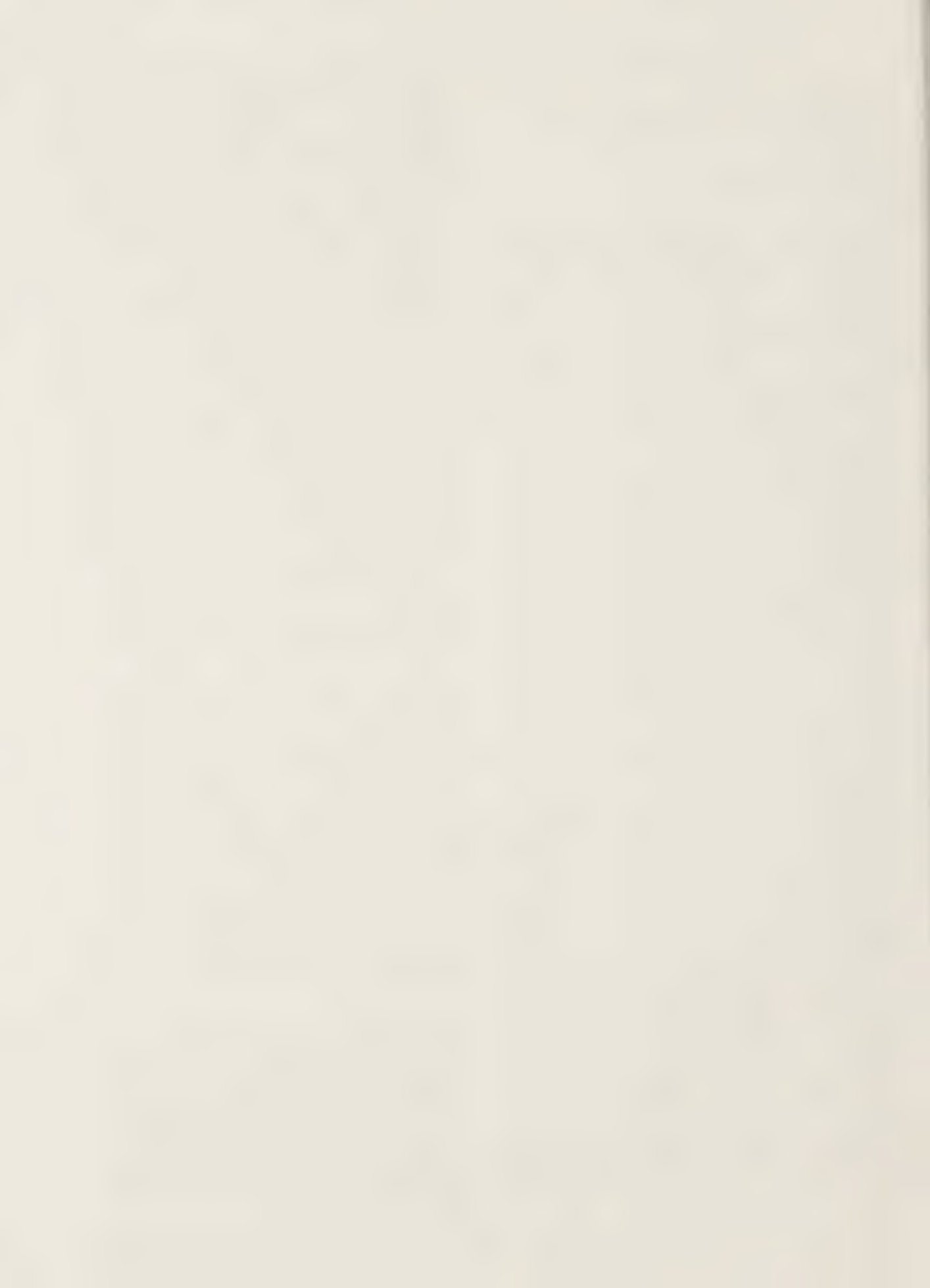
No longer believing, then, that the Bible provides explicit answers to their questions about these topics and others, many people have turned to additional sources of information for the answers they seek: talk shows, self-help manuals, and, most common of all, their own opinions. For instance, because we know friendly Muslims or Unitarians, we wonder if Christ is the only way to the Father like the Bible says He is. We come to justify drunkenness by calling it a time of fellowship with our buddies, and we not only permit but sanction premarital sex because we've been led to believe that there is nothing we can do about it anyway. Of course, what really happens when each person becomes a Bible to his or her own self is exactly what we see when we look on mainline denominations: churches whose common core is not shared spiritually but in just getting along with each other, and whose reluctance to submit to biblical authority creates an atmosphere where we seldom allow the Bible to challenge us and to help us replace our own priorities in line with God's.

The authority of the scriptures does not depend on whether or not God dictated every word of it to the biblical writers in a manner

similar to which God gives the tablets to Moses in the movie, "The Ten Commandments." Neither does it depend upon how closely the scientific knowledge of the biblical writers measures up to what we know today about the functioning of the human body and the movement of the planets around the sun. There has been great scientific and technological progress since the days of the Bible, to be sure, and such developments may raise questions that could not have been imagined those centuries ago, but one thing has remained constant throughout history and always will: the condition of the human soul. God created us upright, but we have all believed that we could find more freedom in writing our own Bibles as we go than in submitting ourselves to God's will. The Bible alone shows us the way back to God's favor—the way of the cross—and in this does its authority rest. I do not deny that the biblical authors possibly could have introduced minor historical or scientific inaccuracies into their texts, but I cannot shirk from saying that in this book is the perfect description and prescription for the universal human condition of sinful separation from God.

To some extent, then, the Bible's authority is self-authenticating. It was through the reading of the Bible or the hearing of its message proclaimed that every believer has come to realize his or her desperate need for the saving mercy of Christ. Thus, the Holy Spirit of God not only uses the Bible to draw the elect to himself but it also obviously inspired the biblical writers to produce the spiritual truths they did so that you and I might benefit from them. You see, we can rightly call the Bible authoritative because both it and our personal testimony of faith ultimately spring from the exact same source: the Holy Spirit.

Galen Johnson is a Summa Cum Laude Graduate of Wake Forest University and currently a Presidential scholar at Princeton Seminary where he continues to remain near the top of his class. Galen has had a number of items published, but he considers preaching his calling. The above article was abstracted from a sermon Galen preached on January 23, 1994.



Why Not Defend The Faith?

Whenever I go out from our community of faith at this seminary, I invariably run into a non-believer who, after discovering my vocation, challenges me to defend my commitment to Christianity. There was a time in the history of our seminary when we were trained to do just that. Students were taught the skill of apologetics, the practice of defending the faith, which has now become a lost science. Why? Shouldn't we be learning how to give a reason for the hope in us? Consider the following views on this subject:

"In Favor of Defending the Faith"

by B.B. Warfield

(Former Hodge Chair of Systematic Theology at Princeton Seminary)

In the face of the world with its opposing points of view and its tremendous energy of thought and incredible fertility in attack and defense, Christianity must think through and organize its, not defense merely, but assault. It is not true that the arguments adduced for the support of the Christian religion lack objective validity. It is not even true that minds of sinful men are inaccessible to the "evidences." All minds are of the same essential structure. Let us, then, cultivate an attitude of courage over and against the investigations of the day. None should be more zealous in them than we.

He that declines controversy "on principle," or from the motives of convenience or prudence, has thereby renounced his confidence in the truth. We all desire a Christianity which is secure from the assaults of the unbelieving world, whether those assaults are made in the name of philosophy and science, or in the name of history and criticism. What fatuity it is to seek it by yielding to the assault all it chooses to demand, and contracting Christianity into dimensions too narrow to call out the world's antipathy and too weak to invite its attack. Such an eviscerated Christianity may no longer be worth the world's notice, and by that same token is no longer worth the Christian's preservation. It has reduced to a vanishing point and is ready to pass away. Many men are fairly carried off their feet by such an attack, and their only thought is to save what they can, however little, out of the destruction which seems to them to have been wrought. With others, it is the result of sheer timidity before the world or before the swelling claims of unbelieving learning; they dare not assert what their hearts still tell them is true in the face of scoffing unbelief. The effort is to save the essence of Christianity from all possible danger from the speculative side. The means

taken to effect this is to yield the whole sphere of "metaphysical" thought to the enemy. The result is the destruction of the whole system of Christian doctrine.

What, then, has been the effect of recent criticism on the validity and force of the Christian evidences? Recent criticism has correctly affected the details and modes of presentation of the old evidences; but it would be beyond the truth to say that it has at all invalidated their essence. Every one of the old lines of proof of the truth of the Christian religion stands today with its validity and cogency unimpaired. Is there, on the whole, less cogent reason now available for accepting Christianity on rational grounds than has seemed to reach heretofore? A thousand times no. Criticism has proved the best friend to apologetics a science has ever had. We must not, then, as Christians, assume an attitude of antagonism toward the truths of reason, or the truths of philosophy, of the truths of science, or the truths of history, or the truths of criticism.

No mistake could be greater than to lead Christians to decline to bring their principles into conflict with those of the unregenerate. It is the better science that ever in the end wins the victory; and paling science is the better science. How shall it win its victory, however, if it declines the conflict? It has been placed in the world to reason its way to the dominion of the world. And it is by reasoning its way that it has come to its kingship. By reasoning it will gather to itself all its own. And by reasoning it will put its enemies under its feet.

"The convictions of the Christian man," we are told, "are not the product of his reasons addressed to his intellect, but the immediate creation of the Holy Spirit in his heart." Therefore, it is intimated, we can not only do very well without these reasons, but it is something like sacrilege to attend them. Such utterances are the intellectual distress of those whose own Apologetic has proved too weak to withstand the Rationalistic assault, and who are fain, therefore, to take refuge from the oppressive rationalism of their understandings in an empty irrationalism of the heart.

(continued)

It is easy, of course, to say a Christian man must take his standpoint not above the Scriptures but in the Scriptures. But before we take our theology from Scripture we must assure ourselves that there is a knowledge of God in the Scriptures. And before we do that, we must assure ourselves that there is a knowledge of God in the world. And, before we do that, we must assure ourselves that a knowledge of God is possible for man. And, before we do that, we must assure ourselves that there is a God to know.

We are not absurdly arguing that Apologetics will of itself make a man a Christian. But neither can it be said that the proclaimed gospel itself can do that. Only the Spirit of life can communicate life to a dead soul. It is certainly not in the power of all the demonstrations in the world to make a Christian. Paul may plant and Apollos water; it is God alone who gives the increase. But it does not seem to follow that Paul would as well, therefore, not plant, and Apollos as well not water. It is beyond all question only the prepared heart that can fitly respond to the "reasons"; but how can even a prepared heart respond, when there are no "reasons" to draw out its actions? [This essay is a redaction of the writings of Warfield on the subject.]

I suppose the reason that we no longer heed Warfield's words is due to the new dominant theological influence over our seminary. Consider the thoughts on this subject by a man we all know and love:

"Against Preparing a Defense For the Faith"

by Karl Barth

Theological thinking which by the grace of God is truly responsible and relevant, and stands in true connexion with contemporary society, will even to-day show itself to be such by not allowing itself to be drawn into discussion of its basis, of the question of the existence of God or of revelation. On the contrary, it will refrain from attempted self-vindication. . . All planned apologetics and polemics have obviously been irresponsible, irrelevant and therefore ineffective. In such apologetics faith must clearly take unbelief seriously. Hence it cannot take itself with full seriousness. Secretly or openly, therefore, it ceases to be faith. (Barth, *Church Dogmatics*, I.1, pp. 29-30; Bromiley translation)

Only one thing cannot be granted to natural theology, namely, that it has a legitimate function in the sphere of the Church, or that in this sphere it has any other destiny than to disappear. The proclamation of the Christian Church or the theology of the Word of God that has a true understanding of itself can have nothing to do with it. It cannot wish to make use of it, and therefore it cannot in fact have any proper use for it. As the content of proclamation and theology it can have no place at all. It can be treated only as non-existent. In this sense, it must be excised without mercy. (Barth, *Church Dogmatics*, II.1, 170)

From its earliest years until 1944, Princeton Theological Seminary required its first year students to take a course in Christian apologetics. At that time, under the strong influence of Barth's rhetoric against natural theology, the Seminary went from requiring apologetics for graduation to not even offering it as an elective! Today many people's hearts are crying out for reasons to hold to the faith. Leaders in the mainstream church have not been adequately trained to address the tough, apologetic issues--people want to know WHY they should believe. The mainstream church is facing the possibility of demise. Unable to obtain satisfactory answers from the church, many people have turned to cults and the other sorts of paganism trying to fill the deep longing in their hearts. These people are looking for clear, honest, and perspicuous responses to their sincere theological concerns. The leaders in the church must be prepared to respond in such a way. The church has become so sensitized that it has lost its life-giving power. "No mistake could be greater," warned Dr. Warfield, than to abandon apologetics. Traditional apologetics are powerful, life-changing, and intellectually sound. The church will do itself and its people well to dust off some of the old answers which have been so beneficial to the church throughout the ages. A revival of solid classical theology in the academic institutions of the church will provide the kind of vision that many people today are yearning for. The new "sophistication" of theology has emptied it of its power. Could it be that God hasn't changed; could it be that the Truth St. Paul DEFENDED on Mars Hill is still the same?

R. Gardiner

The Distinguished Reformed Educational Genealogy of the Current Students of Princeton Seminary:

Showing a Direct Line to John Calvin (1509-1564)

by Richard Gardiner, Class of 1995

Our President, Dr. THOMAS GILLESPIE, who speaks to the students each week in Miller Chapel, is himself a graduate of Princeton Seminary (1954). While he was a student, he sat at the feet of:

Dr. JOHN ALEXANDER MACKAY, who was also a graduate of the seminary (class of 1915). He was a student of:

Dr. BENJAMIN B. WARFIELD, who was also a graduate of the seminary (1876), being a student of:

Dr. CHARLES HODGE,¹ a Princeton Seminary graduate (1819) who, for many years, sat at the feet of:

Dr. ARCHIBALD ALEXANDER,² who was the pupil of:

WILLIAM GRAHAM,³ a graduate of the College of New Jersey in the year 1773, and as such, under the tutelage of:

Dr. SAMUEL STANHOPE SMITH,⁴ who was himself tutored in the same College by:

Dr. JONATHAN EDWARDS, Jr.,⁵ who obviously sat at the feet of:

JONATHAN EDWARDS, the third president of Princeton, being educated both at Yale (A.M., 1723) and as an apprentice to his grandfather:

SOLOMON STODDARD⁶ of Northampton, Massachusetts, who was educated at Harvard College (A.B., 1662) at the feet of:

Dr. CHARLES CHAUNCEY,⁷ an immigrant to this country, having been trained at Trinity College, Cambridge University, at the feet of:

ARCHBISHOP JAMES USSHER,⁸ the celebrated Hebraic scholar who was a pupil of:

WALTER TRAVERS,⁹ the Puritan divine at Christ's College, Cambridge (an associate of Thomas Cartwright and William Perkins) who traveled to Geneva to come under the instruction of:

THEODORE BEZA,¹⁰ the heir of the Reformed movement of his mentor and friend:

JOHN CALVIN

¹See B.B. Warfield, letter to A.A. Hodge, printed in A.A. Hodge, *Life of Charles Hodge* (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1880), p. 588.

²See Charles Hodge, *Autobiography*, printed in A.A. Hodge, *op. cit.*, p. 18.

³See John A. Mackay, "Archibald Alexander: Founding Father," printed in Hugh T. Kerr, ed., *Sons of the Prophets: Leaders in Protestantism From Princeton Seminary* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1963), p. 6.

⁴See Richard A. Harrison, *Princetonians 1769-1775* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1980), p. 290.

⁵See *Princeton University General Catalogue 1746-1906* (Princeton: Princeton University, 1908), p. 48-49.

⁶See *The Memoirs of Jonathan Edwards*, in *The Works of Jonathan Edwards* (Carlisle, PA: Banner of Truth Trust, 1990), Vol. I, p. xxxvi.

⁷See Cotton Mather, *Magnalia Christi Americana* (Carlisle, PA: Banner of Truth, 1979), Vol. II, p. 14 & 31. See also W.C. Fowler, *Memorials of the Chaunceys* (Boston: Henry Dutton and Son, 1858), p. 28.

⁸Cotton Mather, *op. cit.*, Vol. I, p. 464.

⁹See Benjamin Brook, *Lives of the Puritans* (London, 1813), Vol. II, p. 329.

¹⁰*Ibid.*, Vol. II, p. 314. Also *Dictionary of National Biography*, Leslie Stephen and Sidney Lee, eds. (New York: Oxford, 1973), Vol. XIX, p. 1089.

